FOUNDED BY QUAID-I-AZAM MOHAMMAD ALI JINNAH

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Scotland replace Bangladesh in T20 World Cup

• ICC says Bangladesh failed to confirm participation within deadline • Pakistan regrets 'unfair' ICC decision, awaits PM's return to make final move
• Scotland says excited to participate, preparing to reach India soon

By Our Sports Reporter

LAHORE: Bangladesh have been replaced by Scotland for next month's Twenty20 World Cup after the South Asian side refused to travel to co-hosts India, the International Cricket Council said on Saturday, with Pakistan calling out the "unfair treatment".

ICC's decision follows weeks of uncertainty, during which the Bangladesh Cricket Board repeatedly insisted it would not play its scheduled matches in India, citing safety concerns following soured political relations between the neighbours.

Bangladesh had asked the ICC to move their games to the tournament co-hosts Sri Lanka instead, but the governing body rejected the demand, saying there was "no credible or verifiable threat to the safety" of the team.

"Following a meeting on Wednesday, the Bangladesh Cricket Board had been given a 24-hour timeframe to confirm whether its team would participate in India as scheduled," the ICC said in a statement.

"As no confirmation was received within the deadline, the ICC proceeded in line with its established governance and qualification processes to identify a replacement team."

Scotland have replaced Bangladesh in Group 'C', joining England, Nepal, Italy and West Indies.

"Scotland are the next-highest ranked T20 international team that had originally missed T20 World Cup qualification. They are currently ranked 14th, which in fact is ahead of competing teams Namibia, the United Arab Emirates, Nepal, the United States, Canada, Oman and Italy," the ICC added.

Scotland happy to participate

Scotland's national cricket body said it had accepted the ICC's invitation to compete in the fifth straight T20 World Cup.

"This is an exciting opportunity for Scotland's players to compete on the global stage in front of millions of supporters," Cricket Scotland chief executive Trudy Lindblade said in a statement.

"We also acknowledge this opportunity has arisen out of challenging and unique circumstances. Our squad have been training for some weeks in preparation for upcoming tours and are now preparing to arrive in India imminently to acclimatise to local conditions."

There was no immediate comment by the BCB but Pakistan Cricket Board Chairman Mohsin Naqvi said at a news conference at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore that Bangladesh was being treated unfairly.

The T20 World Cup begins on Feb 7, co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka.

Previous tensions

The dispute between New Delhi and Dhaka erupted this month when the Indian cricket board ordered the

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A PALESTINIAN woman ushers her children away from a group of Israeli soldiers during a weekly settlers tour in Hebron, in the occupied West Bank, on Saturday.—Reuters

Outrage as Imaan, Hadi jailed in Peca case

• Already in Adiala prison, lawyer couple convicted on three charges for controversial tweets • Shireen terms verdict 'illegal', PTI's Ayub says legal system is dead
• Minister, PM's aide defend judgement

By Malik Asad

ISLAMABAD: A sessions court sentenced lawyers Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir and her spouse, Hadi Ali Chattha, to a total of 17 years in prison on multiple charges in a case linked to social media posts, sparking outrage among rights groups, opposition parties, and other segments of society on Saturday.

The written order by Additional District and Sessions Judge Muhammad Afzal Majoka said the prosecution had proved its case against Ms Mazari and Mr Chattha under Sections 9 (glorification of an offence), 10 (cyberterrorism) and 26-A (false information) of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca). Under Section 9 of Peca, both were sentenced to five years of rigorous imprisonment and fined Rs5 million each, with an additional year in default. For Section 10, they were each handed 10 years' rigorous imprisonment and fined Rs30m, with two more years in default. Under Section 26-A, they received two years' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs1m each, with six months' additional jail time in case of

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Joined Gaza peace board with cabinet approval: PM

By Our Correspondent

LONDON: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Saturday that the federal cabinet had approved Pakistan joining the Board of Peace, which is led by US President Donald Trump.

A group of leaders and senior officials from 19 countries — including Pakistan — had gathered on stage on Thursday with Trump at a signing ceremony in Davos, Switzerland, to put their names to the founding charter of the body.

Originally meant to oversee peace in Gaza after Israel's two-year bombardment of the Palestinian enclave, the Board of Peace's charter envisions a wider role in resolving international conflicts.

Speaking to the media outside the Pakistan High Commission in London on Saturday, the premier said that he had a "very good trip" to Davos.

PM Shehbaz said that Pakistan had received an invitation from Trump to join the Board of Peace, adding that he accepted with the approval of the cabinet.

"We signed with the hope that there will be peace in Gaza, that Palestinians will receive the respect they deserve, and that Gaza will be reconstructed," the premier said.

PM Shehbaz said the humanitarian situation in Gaza required urgent

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Three die in Lahore hotel blaze; 275 rescued

By Imran Gabol

LAHORE: At least three people were killed and seven others sustained burn injuries after a fire broke out at a hotel in the Gulberg area of Lahore on Saturday.

Rescue 1122 firefighters swiftly launched a major rescue operation and evacuated 275 occupants from the building.

The fire erupted at the Indigo Hotel on Noor Jehan Road while a school event was underway on the premises.

According to Rescue 1122, an emergency call was received at 12:25pm, after which multiple firefighting and rescue teams were dispatched from the Command and Control Centre.

Rescue officials said that 21 emergency vehicles and around 80 rescuers and officers took part in the operation. Seven people were pulled out from the severely affected

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ON OTHER PAGES

Move to split Lahore in two districts

The Lahore city district is likely to be divided into two administrative parts — namely the North and South districts, with plans to implement it after Basant, as a senior official said the city administration has sent the relevant data to the Punjab government. The north district is likely to have Wagah, Ravi, Saddar, Shalimar, City and Cantt tehsils, and the remaining including Model Town and Raiwind in south district, he said. **Page 2**

Airports outsourcing shifted to open bidding

• Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi facilities up for grabs; Privatisation Commission assures domestic, foreign firms of level-playing field; abandons G2G mode amid investors' high interest • Seeks proposals to appoint financial adviser for Roosevelt Hotel; plans joint venture for mixed-use development; aims to finalise transaction in a year

By Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The Privatisation Commission announced on Saturday that the outsourcing operation for the country's three major airports — Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi — will move to an open bidding mode following a high level of interest from various investors.

The commission said the shift from a government-to-government (G2G) mode to open bidding aims to generate a competitive process wherein all domestic and foreign investors will have a level playing field to participate in the bidding process.

According to a commission statement, the envisaged competitive process priorities inclusivity by welcoming participation from all eligible entities, including those from partner nations, while affording equal opportunities to local and foreign investors.

This approach is designed to promote transparency and fair competition, deliver the most advantageous results for Pakistan's economy and reinforce relationships with international partners, the commission said.

The government has been actively considering options for Islamabad International Airport, Karachi's Jinnah International Airport and Lahore's Allama Iqbal International Airport through appropriate modes, including management contracts and long-term commercial concessions.

As part of this strategy, the Islamabad airport has been included in the active privatisation program, consistent with the ongoing process for the airports at Karachi and Lahore.

This follows constructive dialogue with entities from partner nations, including the United Arab Emirates, Turkiye and Saudi Arabia, as well as other international stakeholders.

The commission noted that the primary objectives are to enhance efficiency, improve service delivery, maximise revenue generation, upgrade infrastructure and attract private sector investments. These efforts align with the nation's economic vision to cultivate collaboration to modernise the aviation sector.

Roosevelt Hotel

Separately, the Privatisation Commission has invited technical and financial proposals for the appointment of a financial adviser for the Roosevelt Hotel in New York, aiming to secure a joint venture for mixed-use development of the elite Manhattan property owned by the Pakistan government.

According to the commission's website, proposals can be submitted by Feb 16. The government intends for the transaction regarding the Roosevelt Hotel to be completed in one year.

The commission intends to offer the property for setting up a joint venture project through the "best suited transaction structure and mode of privatisation".

The appointed financial adviser will be tasked with conducting market sounding to validate investor interest in the hotel.

The adviser must identify potentially interested parties and assess the level of interest in the transaction structure options covered in the

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